



Independent conditional clauses in Germanic languages

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Introduction

Independent conditional clauses (ICCs)

(1) *If you could open the window?* (ENGLISH, IC)

(2) *Hvis jeg bare forstod...* (DANISH, IC)

COND I PRT understand.PST

‘If only I understood...’

(3) *Als dat mooi moet zijn...* (DUTCH, IC)

COND DEM pretty must.PRS be.INF

‘If that’s supposed to be pretty...’

- constructions marked as subordinate (conditional subordinator, word order) but used without (immediately) accompanying main clause
- many different pragmatic functions: request, wish, evaluation, ...

Introduction (2)

Aim of this presentation:

Develop a **descriptive analysis** of the functional range of these constructions

- semantics: which parameters used to distinguish different construction types?
 - deontic constructions
 - ‘assertion-suspending’ constructions
 - discursive constructions
- formal characteristics as evidence for construction types

Languages covered: Dutch, German, English, Danish, Swedish, Icelandic

Introduction (3)

Data and literature

- Data:
 - spoken corpora (see references)
 - personal corpus of internet material (IC)
 - additional work with native speakers (Danish, Swedish, Icelandic)
- Literature:

DUTCH Boogaart & Verheij 2013, ENGLISH Adriaensen 2010, Stirling 1998, Fillenbaum 1986, DANISH Hansen & Heltoft 2011, SWEDISH Laury, Lindholm & Lindström 2013, Lindström MS, Teleman et al. 2010, GERMAN Auer 1996, Günthner 1999, Oppenrieder 1989, Weuster 1983

Typology of ICCs in Germanic languages

Deontic constructions

Assertion-suspending constructions

Discursive constructions

Deontic constructions

Basic semantics:

- Construction refers to **hypothetical** state of affairs (SoA), action typically located in the future
- Speaker evaluates action as **desirable**

Further subdivision: parameter of control (cf. Verstraete, D'Hertefelt & Van linden 2012)

- uncontrolled deontic constructions: wishes
- controlled deontic constructions:
 - requests
 - offers

Deontic, uncontrolled: wishes

(4) *Hvis jeg bare forstod...* (DANISH, IC)

COND I PRT understand.PST

‘If only I understood...’

(5) *Er lebte, so viel wüsste sie, aber er konnte noch nicht nach Hause kommen.*

„**Wenn er nur kommt, wenn er nur bald kommt!**“ (GERMAN, IC)

COND he PRT come.PRS cond he PRT PRT come.PRS

‘He was alive, that much she knew, but he couldn’t come home yet. **“If only he comes, if only he comes soon!”**’

Semantics:

- hypothetical SoA evaluated by speaker as desirable
- realization of desirable SoA not controlled by one of conversation participants

Deontic, controlled

Basic semantics:

- hypothetical SoA evaluated by speaker as desirable
- realization of desirable SoA controlled by one of conversation participants: negotiation about realization of particular action

cf. **interactional** property: *uptake* needed → first part of adjacency pair

Further subdivision

- locus of control: who controls realization of desirable SoA? (speaker / hearer)
- SoA desirable for whom? (speaker / hearer)

Deontic, controlled: requests

- (6) *Ef þú vildir kannski vera svo væn að loka glugganum.* (ICELANDIC, C)

window

‘If you would be so kind as to close the window.’

- (7) *P: [om] jag kunde få något /ehm /*
COND I can.PST get.INF something

D: [hm]

D: ja vi har då ingenting som botar oro / (SWEDISH, GSLC)

‘P: [if] I could get some er

D: [hm]

D: well we don’t have anything that fights restlessness’

Deontic, controlled: requests (2)

Semantics:

- locus of control: hearer
- SoA desirable for whom: speaker

cf. **formal characteristics**: modal expressions referring to preparatory condition for directive speech act ('can', 'want')

Deontic, controlled: offers

(8) *Als ik met iets kan helpen...* (DUTCH, IC)

COND I with anything can.PRS help.INF

‘If there’s anything I can help with...’

Semantics:

- locus of control: speaker (but hearer decides if speaker acts or not)
- SoA desirable for whom: hearer

cf. **formal characteristics**: modal expressions referring to either opportunity for speaker to help, or hearer’s want or need for help

Deontic constructions: summary

Common semantic core for deontic constructions:

Hypothetical SoA evaluated by speaker as desirable

Construction type		Realization of SoA controlled by	SoA desirable for whom	Uptake needed
Uncontrolled: wishes		None of conversation participants	Speaker	No
Controlled	Requests	Hearer	Speaker	Yes
	Offers	Speaker	Hearer	Yes

Typology of ICCs in Germanic languages

Deontic constructions

Assertion-suspending constructions

Discursive constructions

Assertion-suspending constructions

‘Suspension of assertion’:

- basic to all conditionals
 - BUT unlike deontic conditionals, ‘assertion-suspending constructions’ refer not to hypothetical and desirable but to **‘given’ SoA** referred to or implied in preceding discourse/context
- could be asserted, but speaker chooses not to
- often dimension of **evaluation** (direct / indirect)

Further subdivision: parameter of polarity reversal

- non-reversed constructions
- reversed constructions

Assertion-suspending, non-reversed

Indirect evaluation (arguments)

(9) *[context: conversation about pensioners trying to earn some extra money by carrying people's groceries to their cars]*

A: *alsof je zelf je boodschappen niet kunt dragen.*

maar ja als 't hun inkomen is ...

but yes COND it their income be.PRS

B: *ja.*

(DUTCH, CGN)

'A: as if you can't carry your groceries yourself

but if it's their income...

B: yes'

Semantics:

Construction refers to 'given' SoA from whose perspective evaluation in previous discourse is not valid → pragmatically '**indirect evaluation**'

Assertion-suspending, reversed

- Constructions referring to ‘given’ Soa
- Always with **polarity reversal** (construction marked as p , but interpreted as $\sim p$), formally marked by scalarity

Further subdivision:

- ‘epistemic orientation’: relating to (existence of) certain ‘state’
 - indirect evaluation: arguments
 - direct evaluation
 - ‘existence’
- ‘deontic orientation’: relating to realization of action
 - threats

Assertion-suspending, reversed: ‘epistemic’

Indirect evaluation (arguments)

(10) A: *ja maar ‘k denk dat ze wel weer kwaad was gisteren.*

B: *ja maar hij heeft dat toch niet veel gedaan.
weekend.*

als	dat	nu	elke	week	zou	zijn	dat	hij	de
COND	DEM	PRT	each	week	would.PRS	be.INF	COMP	he	the
zaterdag	de	zondag	moet	werken	en	zo.			
Saturday	the	Sunday	have.to.PRS	work.INF	and	so			

A: *nee nee dat is uh... hm.* (DUTCH, CGN)

‘A: yeah but I think she was mad again yesterday

B: yes but it’s not like he’s done that a lot.
weekend.

if he had to work weekends every week [I would understand it]

A: no no that’s erm’

Assertion-suspending, reversed: ‘epistemic’ (2)

Semantics:

Construction refers to scenario in which negatively evaluated SoA described in preceding utterance would have been acceptable

BUT formal characteristics: scalarity, combined with marking for low likelihood

→ **polarity reversal**

→ signals scenario did not come true (‘givenness’)

→ no ‘remedy’ for preceding negative evaluation

→ entire construction pragmatically used for signalling **indirect evaluation** (cf. ‘non-reversed arguments’)

Assertion-suspending, reversed: ‘epistemic’ (3)

Direct evaluation

(11) *Veel te strakke broek en – alsof het er nog niet dik genoeg boven op ligt – met van die ballonnen vet erbovenuit.*

Nou, als dat mooi moet zijn! (DUTCH, IC)

PRT COND that pretty have.to.PRS be.INF

‘Way to tight pants and – as if it isn’t obvious enough already – with the fat bulging out on top. **Well, if that’s supposed to be pretty!**’

Semantic description

Construction refers to ‘given’ evaluation with which speaker does not agree

cf. **formal marking**: scalarity → polarity reversal

Assertion-suspending, reversed: ‘epistemic’ (4)

‘Existence’ (?)

(12) *Als er hier nu één iemand is die haat predikt*
COND there here PRT one someone be.PRS REL hate preach.PRS
(DUTCH, IC)

‘If there’s someone preaching hatred here [it’s you]’

(13) *Wenn das kein Beweis ist für die Midlife Crisis* (GERMAN, IC)
COND DEM no proof be.PRS for the midlife crisis
‘If that isn’t proof for the Midlife crisis!’

Assertion-suspending, reversed: ‘epistemic’ (5)

Semantics:

Constructions refers to ‘given’ SoA in which existence of something is confirmed
BUT to what extent evaluation?

Formal marking:

- scalarity → polarity reversal
- contrastive focus

Assertion-suspending, reversed: ‘deontic’

Threats

(14) *Hvað ert þú eiginlega að gera þarna á grafreitnum okkar?*

Ef þú dirfist að snerta hauginn hans afa míns ...

COND you dare.PST.SUBJ INFM touch.INF grave his grandfather mine

(ICELANDIC, IC)

‘What are you doing over there on our burial ground? **If you dare to touch my grandfather's grave...**’

Assertion-suspending, reversed: ‘deontic’ (2)

Pragmatically, construction fulfills deontic function (‘don’t do this’)

→ interpretation triggered by use of *event-initiating* verbs or verbs expressing controllable action + polarity reversal

BUT arguments to classify these constructions as instances of ‘assertion-suspension’

- **semantics**: construction refers to action which speaker suspects hearer will carry out because of contextual etc indications (‘givenness’)
- **formal marking**: scalarity leading to polarity reversal
- **interactional**: no uptake needed ($\leftarrow \rightarrow$ controlled deontic constructions)

Assertion-suspending constructions: summary

Common semantic core: non-assertion of 'given' SoA → often (but not always?) leads to evaluation (direct/indirect)

Constructions			Type of evaluation	Reference to realization of action
Non-reversed			Indirect	No
Reversed: scalarity	Epistemic	Indirect evaluation	Indirect	No
		Direct evaluation	Direct	No
		'Existence'	?	No
	Deontic : threats		?	Yes

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Discursive constructions

Discursive constructions

- Typical 'subordinate' conditional constructions with dependency shift (e.g. Thompson 1985, Verstraete 2005, 2007, D'Hertefelt & Verstraete 2013): propositional → discursive level
- Preceding or following 'matrix' needed (clause or stretch of discourse)
- No specific semantics, but those of all types of subordinated conditional constructions

Further subdivision:

Construction modifies **preceding** or **following** discourse

Discursive: modification of preceding discourse

(15) *[discussion about possible closing of nuclear power plants]*

Openhouden? Ja, als het niet anders kan (DUTCH, IC)

open.keep.INF yes COND it NEG otherwise can.PRS

‘Keep them [i.e. nuclear power plants] open? Yes, **if there’s no other option.**’

Semantics:

Construction describes condition for option described in preceding utterance

Formal marking: no typical characteristics

Discursive: projection into following discourse

(16) *Zahnlückes Lachen bricht jäh ab, als der Kleine wieder fragt:*

"Und wenn er doch kommt ?"

and COND he PRT come.PRS

"Dann nehmen wir ihn auseinander, Pfannkuchen." (GERMAN, IC)

‘Tooth gap stops laughing, as the small one asks again: **“And if he does come?”** “Then we’ll take him apart, Pancake”.’

Semantics: construction describes hypothetical SoA that needs to be discussed further in terms of its possible consequences

cf. **formal marking:** *if* replaceable by *what if*, no other typical formal characteristics

Discursive constructions: summary

Construction	'Matrix' needed	Uptake needed
Modification of preceding discourse	Yes, in previous discourse	No
Projection into following discourse	Yes, in following discourse	Yes, discussion of consequences

ICCs in Germanic languages: summary

Constructions		Construction signals desirability of SoA	SoA refers to	'Matrix' needed	Uptake needed
Deontic	Uncontrolled	Yes	Hypothetical event	No	No
	Controlled				Yes (yes/no)
Assertion-suspending		No	'Given' event	No	No
Discursive	Modification	No	No restrictions	Yes	No
	Projection				Yes (further discussion)

Further questions

ICCs in Germanic languages and their relation to ‘subordinate’ semantics

- deontic constructions: desirability of *hypothetical SoA*
 - assertion-suspending constructions: cf. conditionals like *If that’s the bell ringing, the mailman will have arrived.*
 - discursive constructions: act like ‘basic’ subordinate conditionals, but with wider discursive scope
- all three categories related to conditional property also present in ‘subordinate’ conditionals
- **BUT** not all related to same type of ‘subordinate’ conditionals
- **further research** needed to investigate to what extent the three categories of ICCs can be considered all instances of one encompassing conditional supertype
- BUT see Verstraete, D’Hertefelt & Van linden 2012 and D’Hertefelt and Verstraete 2013 on similar issues regarding complement construction (no complement supertype)

Thank you for your attention!

Abbreviations

- COMP complementizer
- COND conditional
- DEM demonstrative
- INF infinitive
- INFM infinitival marker
- NEG negation
- PRT particle
- PRS present
- PST past
- REL relative marker
- SUBJ subjunctive

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